

**Applied Research Branch  
Strategic Policy  
Human Resources Development Canada**

**Direction générale de la recherche appliquée  
Politique stratégique  
Développement des ressources humaines Canada**

**Custody Arrangements and the  
Development of Emotional or Behavioural  
Problems in Children**

**W-98-9E**

**by**

**Tony Haddad**

**October 1998**

The views expressed in this document are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Human Resources Development Canada or of the federal government.

Les opinions exprimées dans le présent document sont celles des auteurs et ne reflètent pas nécessairement le point de vue de Développement des ressources humaines Canada ou du gouvernement fédéral.

■

The Working Paper Series includes analytical studies and research conducted under the auspices of the Applied Research Branch of Strategic Policy. Papers published in this series incorporate primary research with an empirical or original conceptual orientation, generally forming part of a broader or longer-term program of research in progress. Readers of the series are encouraged to contact the authors with comments and suggestions.

La série des documents de travail comprend des études analytiques et des travaux de recherche réalisés sous l'égide de la Direction générale de la recherche appliquée, Politique stratégique. Il s'agit notamment de recherches primaires, soit empiriques ou originales et parfois conceptuelles, généralement menées dans le cadre d'un programme de recherche plus vaste ou de plus longue durée. Les lecteurs de cette série sont encouragés à faire part de leurs observations et de leurs suggestions aux auteurs.

—

First edition/Première édition - Internet 1998

**ARB publishes papers within the following thematic areas:**

Changing Nature of Work; Employment Insurance Renewal; Exclusion, Marginalization and Overcoming Barriers; Investing in Children and Families; Labour Market Adjustment; Lifelong Learning; Macroeconomic/Labour Market Analysis Services; Skills Requirements in the Knowledge-based Economy; Social Union: The Knowledge and Information Aspects; and Youth Transitions.

A complete list of publications is available upon request, or by visiting our Web site as listed below.

**La DGRA publie les documents selon les domaines thématiques suivants :**

Adaptation au marché du travail; Apprentissage continu; Compétences requises dans l'économie axée sur le savoir; Exclusion, marginalisation et obstacles à surmonter; Investir dans les enfants et les familles; L'union sociale : connaissances et information; Nature changeante du travail; Renouvellement de l'assurance-emploi; Services d'analyse macroéconomique/du marché du travail; et Transitions chez les jeunes.

Une liste complète des publications est disponible sur demande, ou en visitant notre site Web à l'adresse ci-dessous.



**General enquiries regarding the documents published by the Applied Research Branch should be addressed to:**

Publications Coordinator  
Applied Research Branch  
Strategic Policy  
Human Resources Development Canada  
140 Promenade du Portage IV, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Hull, Quebec, Canada  
K1A 0J9

Telephone: (819) 994-3304  
Facsimile: (819) 953-8584  
E-mail: [research@spg.org](mailto:research@spg.org)  
<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/arb/>

**Si vous avez des questions concernant les documents publiés par la Direction générale de la recherche appliquée, veuillez communiquer avec :**

Coordonnatrice des publications  
Direction générale de la recherche appliquée  
Politique stratégique  
Développement des ressources humaines Canada  
140, Promenade du Portage IV, 4<sup>e</sup> étage  
Hull (Québec) Canada  
K1A 0J9

Téléphone : (819) 994-3304  
Télécopieur : (819) 953-8584  
Courrier électronique : [research@spg.org](mailto:research@spg.org)  
<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/dgra>

## Executive Summary

Large numbers of children are experiencing changes in their living arrangements due to their parents' decision to end their marriage and/or common law partnership. A growing body of literature documents the many ways in which children are affected by, and in turn respond to, the disruption of their parents' marriage. There is a consensus among social scientists that the transitions accompanying the breakup of parents are often replete with turmoil for the children. Researchers have found evidence that the divorce or separation of their parents is related to an increase in the incidence of emotional, psychological, behavioural, and physiological problems for the children involved, and that many of these negative outcomes have long-term and sometimes life-long effects.

This paper examines whether children living in post-divorce custody arrangements have more problems than children living with both parents (still married or common-law), and whether children in different types of custody arrangements differ in their odds of having one or more problems of an emotional or behavioural nature. The relative importance of other factors in the outcome of problems for children is also examined.

Findings indicate that overall, more than two-thirds of children living with both parents and living in post-divorce custody arrangements are reported as well-adjusted, exhibiting no problems *at all*. Importantly, and contrary to popular assumptions, children living in some form of post-divorce custody are only *slightly* more likely to exhibit one or more problems than children living with both parents. In terms of other factors, being male appears to be highly related to a child's risk for having problems, while the presence of siblings seems to have a protective effect. When we turn to the characteristics of the Person Most Knowledgeable about the child (PMK) we see that children whose PMK's were younger, had not graduated from high school, and had lower household incomes were at increased risk of having problems. Results also indicate that as time passes, children become more adjusted to the reality of their parents' separation.

The results of this analysis put into question the widely held myth that children living in sole post-divorce custody arrangements, especially with their mothers are "problem kids." Practitioners and policy makers must therefore be sensitive to meeting the needs of children of divorce as a group, rather than focusing their efforts on initiatives or programs for children of single, divorced mothers or fathers. There is a need to develop strategies for providing support for children immediately or soon after the breakup of their parents in order to alleviate the stress they may be facing and to assist them in dealing with the dramatic changes in their lives. Programs are also required to assist parents in developing healthy parenting skills.

Parenthood is one of the most important occupations in any society; yet, it is one of the few that has no formal training requirements. Educational initiatives encouraging and promoting healthy parenting techniques, and parenthood as an active and interactive process would likely go a long way in assisting families dealing with both divorce and everyday life issues.

## Sommaire

Un grand nombre d'enfants voient leur vie bouleversée à la suite de la décision de leurs parents de mettre un terme à leur mariage et(ou) à leur union de fait. Il y a de plus en plus d'études qui analysent les nombreuses façons dont les enfants sont touchés par la fin du mariage de leurs parents et y réagissent. Les spécialistes des sciences sociales s'entendent pour dire que les transitions qui accompagnent la séparation des parents sont souvent synonymes de bouleversements pour les enfants. Les chercheurs ont montré que le divorce ou la séparation des parents est corrélé à une augmentation de l'incidence des problèmes affectifs, psychologiques, comportementaux et physiologiques chez les enfants, et qu'un grand nombre de ces résultats négatifs ont des effets à long terme qui durent parfois toute une vie.

Ce document détermine si les enfants en situation de garde après divorce ont plus de problèmes que les enfants qui vivent avec leurs deux parents (mariés ou conjoints de fait), et si les enfants affichent les mêmes risques d'éprouver un ou plusieurs problèmes affectifs ou comportementaux selon le genre de modalités de garde. L'importance relative d'autres facteurs dans le dénouement des problèmes pour les enfants est également examinée.

Selon les résultats de la recherche, plus des deux tiers des enfants qui vivent avec leurs deux parents ou qui vivent en situation de garde après divorce se sont bien adaptés, n'affichant aucun problème. Par ailleurs, et contrairement à ce que l'on pourrait penser, les enfants qui vivent en situation de garde après divorce ne sont que légèrement plus susceptibles que les enfants qui vivent avec leurs deux parents d'afficher un ou plusieurs problèmes. En ce qui concerne d'autres facteurs, il semble y avoir une forte corrélation entre le fait d'être de sexe masculin et la vulnérabilité de l'enfant aux problèmes, tandis que la présence d'autres frères ou sœurs semble avoir un effet protecteur. Lorsque nous examinons les caractéristiques de la personne qui connaît le mieux l'enfant (PCM), nous constatons que lorsqu'elle est plus jeune, qu'elle n'a pas terminé ses études secondaires et qu'elle a un revenu inférieur, les risques que les enfants aient des problèmes s'accroissent. Les résultats indiquent également qu'avec le temps, les enfants s'adaptent mieux à la réalité de la séparation de leurs parents.

Les résultats de cette analyse remettent en question le mythe voulant que les enfants qui vivent avec un seul parent après le divorce, particulièrement s'il s'agit de la mère, soient des «enfants problèmes». Les praticiens et les décideurs doivent donc prendre soin de répondre aux besoins des enfants du divorce collectivement, plutôt que de faire porter leurs efforts sur des initiatives ou des programmes s'adressant aux enfants de père ou de mère divorcé seul. Il y a lieu d'élaborer des stratégies visant à offrir du soutien aux enfants immédiatement après la séparation de leurs parents ou peu de temps après, pour alléger le stress qu'ils peuvent éprouver et les aider à s'adapter à ces changements profonds dans leur vie. Il faut également prévoir des programmes pour aider les parents à acquérir de saines aptitudes parentales.

Le métier de parent est l'un des métiers les plus importants de toute société; mais c'est l'un des rares métiers qui n'exigent pas de formation formelle. Des initiatives pédagogiques qui ont pour objet d'encourager et de promouvoir des techniques parentales saines et le métier de parent en tant que processus actif et interactif permettraient d'aider les familles qui vivent un divorce parallèlement aux autres problèmes de la vie quotidienne.

## **Acknowledgements**

The author wishes to thank Satya Brink, Allen Zeesman and Christina Norris for insightful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper. He also extends appreciation to Peter Smith, Susan McKellar, Cindy Cook, Liz Nieman, and Sarah Connor for their assistance and collegiality.

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	3
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>2. Research Questions</b> .....	9
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	11
3.1 Dependent Variable: Emotional or Behavioural Problems.....	11
3.2 Independent Variables .....	11
<b>4. Results of Data Analysis</b> .....	13
<b>5. Discussion</b> .....	19
<b>6. Some Policy Implications</b> .....	20
References .....	21

## 1. Introduction

Large numbers of children are experiencing changes in their living arrangements due to their parents' decision to end their marriage and/or common law partnership. Recent statistics inform us that 15.7 percent of Canadian children under 12 years of age are now residing with one parent,<sup>1</sup> while an additional 8.6 percent live either in a reconstituted family or with adults who are not their biological parents<sup>2</sup> (Marcil-Gratton, 1998). Marcil-Gratton's (1993) analysis of earlier surveys (the 1984 Family History Survey and the 1990 General Social Survey) further demonstrated that 25 percent of adults had experienced at least one disruption of their parents' relationship and that about half of these episodes took place prior to respondents' tenth birthday.

A growing body of literature documents the many ways in which children are affected by, and in turn respond to, the disruption of their parents' union. There is a consensus among social scientists that the transitions accompanying the breakup of parents are often replete with turmoil for the children. Researchers have found evidence that the divorce or separation of their parents is related to an increase in the incidence of emotional, psychological, behavioural and physiological problems for the children involved, and that many of these negative outcomes have long term, and sometimes life-long effects (Cochran and Vitz, 1983; Kalter, 1987; Fulton, 1979).

The question of what happens to children after their parents relationship ends is a complex and multi-dimensional one that is currently attracting intense scrutiny by policy-makers in Canada. In March, 1998, The Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on Child Custody and Access (SJCCCA) began public hearings across Canada. This Committee, which is due to release its final report at the end of November, 1998, is mandated to "assess the need for a more child-centred approach to family law policies and practices that would emphasize joint parental responsibilities and child-focused parenting arrangements based on children's needs and best interests" (Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access, 1998). As such, it has focused its meetings, to a large extent, on discussions of a wide variety of legal and sociological

---

<sup>1</sup>With the mother in 93 percent of the cases.

<sup>2</sup> Marcil-Gratton's (1998) analysis is based on the results of the first cycle of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada, 1995).

issues relating to the effects of various forms of custody and/or parental access arrangements following the dissolution of their parents' relationships.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> See minutes from the public consultation meetings of the SJCCA, Dec. 11, 1997 to June 15, 1998.



## 2. Research Questions

This paper is primarily empirical in nature and aims to consider evidence useful for making decisions in the best interest of the child. Specifically, it focuses on the question of whether or not different types of custody arrangements are more or less associated with the development of emotional or psychological problems among children between the ages of 2 and 11 years. The general lack of nationally representative empirical data on the factors associated with positive and negative outcomes of child development in Canada<sup>4</sup> makes such research timely and vital to the process of building policies that are more sensitive to children's needs and interests.

To accomplish the objectives of this analysis, I employ the results of the first cycle of the nationally representative National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, undertaken between the Fall of 1994 and the Spring of 1995, by Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada. The primary research questions addressed in this paper are:

1. *Are children living in post-divorce/separation custody arrangements more likely to have emotional or behavioural problems than children living with both parents?*

If children living in custody have more problems relative to those living with both birth parents, then the widely held belief that children whose parents have divorced/separated are more likely to be "trouble or troubled" will be supported.

2. *Do children in specific types of custody arrangements differ in the odds of having one or more problems of an emotional or behavioural nature?*

A lack of difference between the three dominant forms of custody arrangements (mother only, father only, and shared) would provide preliminary evidence that divorce/separation and the accompanying disruption of the family are the precursors of problems for children, rather than the particular type of custody arrangement in which the children are placed after the divorce or separation. This is an important question, given the unfortunate stereotyping of the children of "broken families," especially those living with divorced/separated, as "out-of-control" and maladjusted.

---

<sup>4</sup> A review of the literature demonstrates that most published research on child development in Canada is based on data collected in the United States and Britain. The NLSCY represents the first nationally representative and longitudinal survey on this topic in Canada.

3. *What is the relative importance of other factors in the outcome of problems for children?*

A fuller understanding of child development requires a thorough examination of the multiple correlates of problem outcomes as well as the relative strength of these factors.

The analysis in this paper is conducted in two stages. The first stage begins with a comparison of the rates of emotional or behavioural problems experienced by children living with both parents in intact families and those living in post-divorce/separation custody (mother only, father only, or shared), along with the characteristics of the child, the characteristics of the person most knowledgeable about the child (the PMK<sup>5</sup>), as well as household income. Following this, we compare the incidence of specific problems experienced by children living with both parents to those living in post-divorce/separation custody arrangements.

In stage two of the analysis, we examine the results of logistic regression models, asking: what are the odds that a child will experience one or more emotional or behavioural problems in relation to the variables in the analysis? The first model compares children living with both parents to those living in post-divorce/separation custody arrangements, while controlling for the age, sex and number of siblings of the child; the age and education of the PMK; as well as household income. Researchers in the United States and Britain have found consistent evidence that these variables are important determinants of problem outcomes for children. The second model focuses specifically on children living in *post-divorce/separation custody* arrangements, while controlling for the same variables as the first model, in addition to the number of years the parents have been separated. The aim of the second model is to examine the differences in the likelihood of problem outcomes for the three dominant categories of post-divorce/separation custody arrangements (mother only, father only, and shared custody). The ultimate objective of these analyses is to assess the extent to which living in a post-divorce/separation custody arrangement, in general, and living in a specific type of post-divorce/separation custody arrangement, in particular, are related to the development of emotional or behavioural problems among children aged 2 to 11 years.

---

<sup>5</sup> Interviewers administered the questionnaire to the Person Most Knowledgeable about the child (PMK). The PMK is the mother of the child in 90 percent of the cases in the NLSCY.

### 3. Methodology

The data examined are derived from the first cycle of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, which was undertaken between the Fall of 1994 and the Spring of 1995 by Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada. The NLSCY represents the first nationally representative, longitudinal study of the development of children in Canada. The sample for this cycle consists of 22, 831 children aged 0 to 11 years; the analysis in this paper focuses on the sub-sample of 18, 174 children who were between the ages of 2 and 11 years. The operational definitions of the variables in the analysis are outlined below.

#### 3.1 Dependent Variable: Emotional or Behavioural Problems

Emotional and behavioural problems<sup>6</sup> include the following: anxiety, emotional disorder, hyperactivity, inattention, conduct disorder, physical aggression and unsocial behaviour<sup>7</sup>. The presence or absence of these problems was measured by means of indices calculated from responses to scales measuring each emotional or behavioural problem. Latent class analysis was employed to categorize each index into the following categories: child has the problem, child has somewhat of a problem, and child has no problem. Those children categorized as “child has the problem” on any one or more of the seven scales measuring the various problems (anxiety, emotional disorder, hyperactivity, inattention, conduct disorder, physical aggression and unsocial behaviour) are considered to have “one or more problems” for the purpose of the logistic regression analysis.

#### 3.2 Independent Variables

##### *Living Arrangement*

The response categories for this variable are: “live with both parents” and “live in post-divorce/separation custody.” When entered into the model examining only children living in post-divorce/separation custody, the response categories for types of custody arrangements are detailed, including “mother only,” “father only,” and “shared.”

---

<sup>6</sup> See *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth user's Handbook and Microdata Guide* (Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada, 1997) for the indicators employed in each scale.

<sup>7</sup> Low scores on prosocial behaviour are considered an indication of unsocial behaviour for this analysis.

*Age of the Child*

The age of the child was measured in years. For the purpose of the descriptive analysis, it was recorded into categories. When entered into the logistic regression models, it was entered as a continuous variable.

*Sex of the Child*

The sex of the child was reported by the Person Most Knowledgeable about the child.

*Education of the PMK*

This variable is measured at the nominal level, with the following response categories: “less than secondary,” “secondary school,” “some post secondary,” and “college or university degree.”

*Age of the PMK*

Was reported in years; for the purposes of the descriptive analysis, it was recoded into categories. Age was left as a continuous variable when entered into the logistic regression models.

*Household Income*

Was measured using the following response categories: “under \$10, 000,” “\$10, 000 to \$14, 999,” “\$15, 000 to \$19, 999,” “\$20, 000 to \$29, 999,” “\$30, 000 to \$39, 999,” “\$40, 000 to \$49, 999,” “\$50, 000 and over. When entered into the logistic regression models, each category was recoded to its midpoint.

*Number of Siblings*

This was measured as a continuous variable, in both the descriptive and logistic regression analyses.

## 4. Results of Data Analysis

Table 1 summarizes the percentage of children who exhibit one or more behavioural or psychological problems by living arrangements and the variables in the analysis. Overall, more than two-thirds of children living with both parents and living in post-divorce/separation custody arrangements are reported as well-adjusted, exhibiting no problems *at all*. Importantly, and contrary to popular assumptions, children living in some form of custody are only *slightly* more likely to exhibit one or more problems than children living with both parents. The prevalence of problems among children in post-divorce/separation custody arrangements is about 5 percentage points higher than for those living with both parents.

Figure 1 summarizes the differences between children living with both parents in intact families and those living in post-divorce/separation custody, in relation to the seven emotional or behavioural problems. There are important differences between children living with both parents and those living in post-divorce/separation living arrangements with regards to the particular development of particular problems. Children in post-divorce/separation custody arrangements are most likely to exhibit symptoms of anxiety, emotional disorder, hyperactivity, inattention, conduct disorder and physical aggression. This group of children, however, is less likely than children living with both parents to behave in ways that are unsocial. It is likely that the practicalities of everyday life pressure these children to help out their parent and siblings at home, and engage in other pro-social activities (especially in relationship to members of their household), in the absence of another parent.

Table 2 presents the results of the first logistic regression model examining the likelihood of children experiencing one or more emotional or behavioural problems, by custody arrangements (either living in an intact family with both parents or living in any type of post-divorce/separation custody arrangement), the age, sex and number of siblings of the child; the age and education of the PMK; as well as household income. This model seeks to answer the question: are children living in post-divorce custody more likely to experience behavioural or emotional problems than those living with both parents (in intact families)?

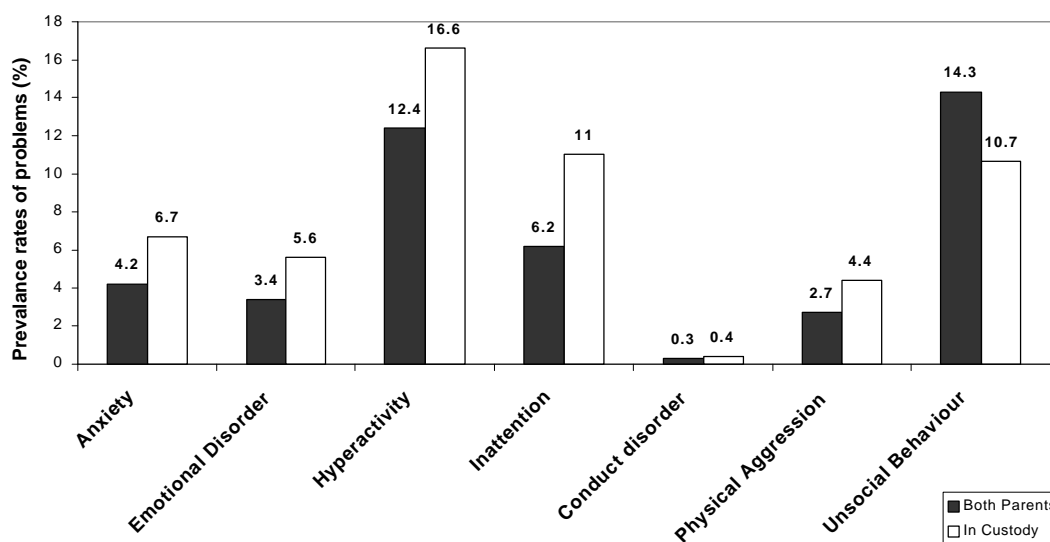
**Table 1: The Presence of One or More Problems for 2 to 11 Year Old Children:  
Comparing Those Living with Both Parents to Those in Post-Divorce/Separation  
Custody, by Select Variables (Percentages Across)**

		Live with both parents		Live in post-divorce/separation custody♦♦	
		% with No Problems	% with 1+ Problems	% with No Problems	% with 1+ Problems
Gender of child	Male	34.5	16.6	31.1	20.0
	Female	37.5	11.4	36.1	12.8
	Total	72.0	28.0	67.2	32.8
Age of child	2 to 3 years	13.3	7.4	9.8	5.9
	4 to 6 years	22.1	8.1	20.9	8.8
	7 to 9 years	22.0	7.6	20.3	10.4
	10 to 11 years	14.6	4.9	16.2	7.8
	Total	72.0	28.0	67.2	32.8
Education of PMK♦	Less than secondary	10.0	5.3	13.4	9.0
	Secondary school	13.3	4.9	13.2	5.6
	Some post secondary	20.4	7.8	21.1	10.5
	College or university degree	28.2	10.0	19.8	7.5
	Total	72.0	28.0	67.5	32.5
Age of PMK	19 to 24 years	1.4	1.0	3.6	2.4
	25 to 29 years	8.3	4.0	11.6	6.3
	30 to 34 years	22.6	9.6	21.8	10.0
	35 to 39 years	24.5	8.5	19.2	9.2
	40 years and over	15.2	4.9	11.2	4.7
	Total	72.0	28.0	67.4	32.6
Household Income	Under \$10,000	0.8	0.5	3.7	1.3
	\$10,000 to \$14,999	2.9	1.5	12.9	7.6
	\$15,000 to \$19,999	3.7	2.0	10.7	4.6
	\$20,000 to \$29,999	7.1	2.9	12.0	5.5
	\$30,000 to \$39,999	10.0	4.1	7.2	4.4
	\$40,000 to \$49,999	11.4	4.1	10.5	4.2
	\$50,000 and over	35.9	13.0	10.1	5.1
	Total	71.9	28.1	67.2	32.8
Number of Siblings	Zero	10.2	4.7	17.9	8.4
	One	35.1	14.1	29.8	15.0
	Two	18.0	6.4	13.5	7.2
	Three or more	8.6	2.8	5.9	2.3
	Total	72.0	28.0	67.2	32.8

♦♦ Either mother only, father only or shared custody.

♦ Person most knowledgeable about the child.

**Figure 1: The Proportion of Children 2 to 11 with Emotional or Behavioral Problems: Comparing Those Living with Both Parents to Those in Post-Divorce/Separation Custody**



Controlling for the other variables in the model, we note that children living in post-divorce/separation custody are indeed more likely to have problems. The odds of these children having one or more problems is 13 percent higher than for children living with both parents. However, custody arrangement is barely significant at the .05 confidence level, suggesting that the variable is a relatively weak predictor of child problem outcomes. Perhaps more important and interesting is the fact that the other variables in the model appear to be more strongly related to the odds of a child exhibiting one or more problems. For example, a consideration of gender reveals that the odds of girls having one or more problems are 38 percent lower than for boys. Every increase of one year in the child's age is also related to a decrease of 10 percent in the likelihood of the child having problems. The number of siblings is also related to the incidence of one or more emotional or behavioural problems for children: with each additional sibling, the likelihood of a child having at least one problem is decreased by seven percent. The presence of siblings appears to protect children from developing problems, likely due to the increase in social interaction with sisters and/or brothers. Being male, on the other hand, appears to be highly related to a child having emotional or behavioural problems. A possible explanation for this finding is that gender role socialization, which begins early in life, puts different expectations and stresses on males than on females. It is clear that the characteristics of the child are strong predictors of emotional and behavioural problems.

**Table 2: Dichotomous Logistic Regression Model: The Odds of a Child Having One or More Problems by the Variables in the Analysis**

		B	S.E.	Odds Ratio
Living Arrangement	Intact family=Reference Post-divorce custody	0 .119*	- .054	1 1.13
<u>Characteristics of Child</u>				
Gender of child	Male=Reference Female	0 -.482***	- .033	1 .62
Age of child	Number of years	-.107***	.018	.90
Number of Siblings	Number of siblings	-.078***	.020	.93
<u>Characteristics of PMK♦</u>				
Education of PMK	Less than secondary Secondary school Some post secondary College or university degree=Reference	.349*** -.020 .063 0	.051 .049 .042 -	1.42 1.02 1.06 1
Age of PMK	Number of years	-.084***	.018	.92
Household Income	Category mid-points	-.028**	.011	.97
Model $\chi^2$	463.4***			
R <sup>2</sup>	.025			
N	16551			

\*p≤.05

\*\*p≤.01

\*\*\*p≤.001

♦Person most knowledgeable about the child.

When we turn to the characteristics of the PMK, we note that PMK's education and age, as well as household income are also strongly associated with the odds of a child having problems.

PMKs who have not graduated from high school are 42 percent more likely to report that their children exhibit problems than PMKs who hold university or college degrees. Each year increase in the age of the PMK is also associated with an eight percent decrease in the odds of the child having a problem. Finally, the higher the household income, the lower the likelihood of a child having a problem; each categorical increase in household income is related to a decrease of three percent in the odds of a child having a problem. The education of the PMK is likely related to an increased understanding of the importance of positive and healthy parenting practices, including



the need to communicate more openly with the child and provide encouragement/support when needed. The increase in experience and knowledge normally associated with the age of the parent(s) may impact positively on the socio-psychological development of the child. Household income, and the ability of the parent(s) to provide the necessities as well as the luxuries to the child are necessarily related to an increase in the quality of life and the healthy development of the child. The characteristics of the PMK are also strongly related to whether or not children experience problems.

Table 3 considers only children who are living in *post-divorce/separation custody* arrangements in relation to differences in the likelihood of the child having one or more problems. Controlling for the other variables in the analysis, we observe that the particular type of custody arrangement is not significant; the results of the logistic regression model suggest that children in the sole custody of their father, the sole custody of their mother, or in a shared custody arrangement do not differ in the likelihood of having one or more problems. The variables most strongly related to the outcome of behavioural or emotional problems are the child's sex and age, the PMK's education and the number of years that the parents have been separated. Female children are 44 percent less likely to experience a problem than male children. Every year that the child ages is associated with a decrease of 8 percent in the likelihood that he/she will have an emotional or behavioural problem. PMKs who have not graduated from high school and PMKs with some post secondary education are more likely to report that a child has a problem than are PMKs with university or college degrees. Relative to PMKs with college or university degrees, those with no high school and those with some post secondary education are 92 and 34 percent, respectively, more likely to indicate that their child has an emotional or behavioural problem. Finally, *every year that passes since the parents separated is associated with a 10 percent decrease in the odds of the child having a problem*. Similar to the first logistic regression model, the results of this model demonstrate that the sex of the child, and the PMKs education are strong determinants of problem outcomes. Male children tend to be much more prone to developing behavioural or emotional problems than females, as are children whose parents have little education. Alternatively, being female or the child of university educated parents "protects" children from problems. Again, these findings may be explained by gender socialization and (with regards to education) the understandings that parents have of the importance of "being there" for their children. The finding that children become less vulnerable to problems as the years pass since

their parents' divorce/separation suggests that it is the trauma and drama of the changes in their lives as well as the conflict between their parents (conflict which is generally most intense at the time of the separation) that underlies the development of problems. This finding also suggests that there is a waning effect over time; the longer since parents are divorced, the more adjusted children become to the reality of their new lives.

**Table 3: Dichotomous Logistic Regression Model: The Odds of a Child Having One or More Problems by the Variables in the Analysis, for Children Living in Post-Divorce/Separation Custody**

		B	S.E.	Odds Ratio
Custody Arrangement	Mother only=Reference	0	-	1
	Father only	-.187	.204	1.02
	Shared	.202	.170	.83
<u>Characteristics of Child</u>				
Gender of child	Male=Reference	0	-	1
	Female	-.573***	.100	.56
Age of child	Number of years	.153*	.061	1.17
Number of Siblings	Number of siblings	-.029	.058	.97
<u>Characteristics of PMK♦</u>				
Education of PMK	Less than secondary	.651***	.150	1.92
	Secondary school	.139	.153	1.15
	Some post secondary	.291*	.134	1.34
	College or university degree=reference	0	-	1
Age of PMK	Number of years	-.096	.051	.91
Household Income	Category mid-points	.025	.029	1.03
Years Parents Separated	Years	-.107***	.030	.90
Model $\chi^2$	68.71***			
R <sup>2</sup>	.035			
N	1623			

\*p≤.05

\*\*p≤.01

\*\*\*p≤.001

♦ Person most knowledgeable about the child.

## 5. Discussion

An important finding of this paper has been that the vast majority of Canadian children are resilient to change and are free of emotional and behavioural problems, whether they live in intact families with both parents or whether they live in post-divorce/separation custody.

The results of the logistic regression models suggest that the outcome of emotional or behavioural problems in children is likely a consequence of a more complicated set of processes than can be causally attributed by custody arrangements or the other variables in the analysis.

The magnitude of the R square coefficient for both logistic regression models further corroborates this assertion. The R square for the first model and the second model are .025 and .035 respectively, suggesting that only 2.5 percent and 3.5 percent of the variance in each model is accounted for by the independent variables we considered. The results generated by the logistic regression analyses also suggest that the other factors examined are more important to the development of emotional or behavioural problems in children than living in a post-divorce/separation custody arrangement.

The findings of this analysis put into question the widely held myth that children living in sole custody arrangements, especially with their mothers, are “problem kids.” Children, similar to many adults, generally do not take well to sudden and dramatic changes in their lives. The disruption of their parents’ marriage more often than not leads to the disruption of their own lives and the lifestyle that they learned to accept as permanent. This may partly explain why children are more likely to experience problems when they live in post-divorce/separation custody arrangements in general, and why the odds of experiencing a problem are not different if they live in a specific type of post-divorce/separation custody arrangement.

## 6. Some Policy Implications

Practitioners and policy makers must therefore be sensitive to meeting the needs of children of divorce/separation as a group, rather than focusing their efforts on initiatives or programs for children of single mothers or single fathers. There is a need to develop strategies for providing support for children immediately or soon after the breakup of their parents is known in order to alleviate the stress they may be facing and to consequently assist them in dealing with the dramatic changes in their lives, including feelings of anger, rejection and frustration that often arise under such circumstances.

The educational as well as health care systems would be particularly important stakeholders in the development of programs and initiatives aimed at supporting children on a continual basis, in dealing with changes inside and outside of their families—both of which are taking place at a faster rate than any other time in recent history. Such programs could focus on counseling, peer-support groups, and educational initiatives aimed at teachers, health professionals and others dealing closely with children who are experiencing the problems.

Programs are also required to assist parents in developing healthy parenting skills. Such programs would be universal (for all parents) and/or specific to parents experiencing disruption in their marriage. Parenthood is one of the most important occupations in any society; yet, it is one of the few that has no formal training requirements. Educational initiatives encouraging and promoting healthy parenting techniques, and parenthood as an *active and interactive* process, would likely go a long way in assisting families dealing with divorce/separation as well as everyday life issues.

In conclusion, these programs would be most successful if integrated with programs aimed at meeting the practical needs of the families. While counseling parents and/or children after the breakup of the family may be useful, it may not go far enough in helping them deal with issues related to the divorce/family disruption. For example, a divorced/separated mother with one or more young children may experience the disruption of the marriage and family in a more traumatic way if the household income suddenly falls and it becomes difficult to pay the rent or feed the children. Thus, providing financial supports under these circumstances would be important.

## References

Cochran, R. and P. Vitz, 1983. "Child Protective Divorce laws: A Response to the Effects of parental Separation on Children." *Family Law Quarterly*, vol. 17.

Fulton, J. 1979. "Parental Reports of children's Post Divorce Adjustment." *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 35 (4).

Kalter, N., 1987. "Long Term Effects of Divorce on Children: a Developmental Vulnerability Model." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 59 (4).

Marcil-Gratton, N., 1998. "Growing Up with Mom and Dad? The intricate family life courses of Canadian children." Catalogue no. 89-566-XIE. Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada.

Marcil-Gratton, N., 1993. "Growing Up with a Single Parent, A Transitional Experience? Some Demographic Measures" in Hodson, J. and B. Galaway (Eds.), *Single Parent Families: Perspectives on Research and Policy*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.

Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access, 1998. News Release, February 4, 1998. Government of Canada, Ottawa.